

President Clinton. It certainly can. It certainly can.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:55 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks on International Women's Day

March 11, 1998

Thank you. Thank you very much, Doctor. And to all our distinguished guests here today, let me welcome you and say that I have rarely enjoyed anything in this room as much as I have what has already happened.

I've told this story before, but I feel just like I did the first time I gave remarks, a speech, as a public official. It was at one of these civic banquets, and it started at 6 o'clock in the evening. Everyone in the audience was introduced, hundreds of people—except three people, and they went home mad. [Laughter] Five people spoke before me. I got up to speak at a quarter to 10, and the man who introduced me did not do nearly as good a job as our distinguished guest from Thailand—he said, “You know, you could stop here and have had a very nice evening.” [Laughter] Well, we could certainly stop here and have had a very fine occasion.

Let me begin by thanking the Secretary-General for being here. We've had a very good meeting, just before we came over here to talk about our shared goal of preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction and of securing Iraq's compliance with its obligations under the U.N. Security Council resolutions.

The Secretary-General deserves the thanks of all Americans for securing the agreement with the Iraqi Government to open all sites for inspection. The commitments made to him, as well as last week's successful U.N. inspections in sites that had previously been closed, are quite significant. They must be carried out. The last 6 days must be replicated in the coming 6 months.

And the United States must remain vigilant to see that that occurs.

Let me say, since we're honoring women today, in case you all missed it and you want to be reminded of what the stakes are and what is going on now, I commend to you the op-ed article from the distinguished British physician in the hometown paper here today, discussing the consequences of the use of chemical weapons. Mr. Secretary-General, your work is important, and we intend to see that you succeed.

Let me also say that the United Nations is an invaluable partner in an increasingly interdependent world where we have to work together on things, as evidenced by the presence here today of members of the diplomatic corps, the Russian Health Minister, our distinguished physician from Thailand, and so many people from the U.N., and those of you in NGO's who work around the world. If the United States expects to continue to exercise a leadership role in a way that benefits our own people in the 21st century, we have got to pay our U.N. dues and fulfill our responsibilities.

The Secretary-General has supported the reform of the U.N. in positive ways, and I'm doing my best to get legislation through the Congress, which will fulfill our responsibilities to the United Nations, to the IMF, to the cause of U.N. reform.

I'm very proud to be here with all of you today to celebrate your progress and to chart our course to the future. I especially thank the Members of Congress who are here and those whom they represent who couldn't be present for their support and leadership. I thank the First Lady, the Secretary of State, and the Attorney General for the accomplishments of the last 5 years. I think it's fair to say, that as long as I live, I will always look back on the First Lady's speech at Beijing as one of the high watermarks of our public service in this White House.

You know, we always say that human rights must be a central pillar of America's foreign policy, but that is meaningless if those rights are not fully enjoyed by half the people on the planet. Secretary Albright has already discussed our assistance to Afghan women and girls who have suffered much under the

Taliban. Today I want to announce some further actions to advance your cause and our cause.

First, I'm instructing Secretary Albright and our AID Administrator, Brian Atwood, to expand our international efforts to combat violence against women. All too often, we know violence limits the choices open to women and young girls, damaging their health, disrupting their lives, obstructing their full participation in society. We will provide \$10 million to strengthen partnerships with governments and NGO's to help them to fight violence against women everywhere.

Second, I am launching a variety of steps to combat the inhumane practice of trafficking of women. I've asked our Attorney General to make sure that our own laws are adequate to the task we face here at home, that trafficking is prevented, victims are protected, traffickers are punished. And we will use our consular and law enforcement presence in other nations to combat trafficking worldwide, to assist victims, improve legislation, train judges and law enforcement officials in other lands. We will step up our public education campaigns abroad in an attempt to stop trafficking at its source.

Secretary Albright has already discussed her partnership with the Government of Ukraine to jointly develop a comprehensive strategy to fight trafficking to and from that country with the hope that our cooperation will become a model for other nations across the globe.

Finally, I have asked my Interagency Council on Women to convene an international conference to cast a spotlight on this human rights atrocity and develop new strategies to combat it. One important tool, as the Secretary-General has reminded us, for making progress on these issues is the Women's Human Rights Treaty, the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. It has the cumbersome acronym of CEDAW, but its message is very simple.

Again, I thank the Secretary-General for his leadership. I ask you to think about this

convention and its impact. It has a proven record of helping women around the world to combat violence, gain economic opportunity, strike against discriminatory laws. Its provisions are consistent with United States law, which already provides strong protections for women. It offers a means for reviewing and encouraging other nations' compliance.

Yet, because of our historic and often manifest allergy to joining international conventions, we remain alone in our hemisphere, alone among the industrialized nations of the world, apart from 161 other nations alongside nations like Sudan and North Korea in not ratifying this treaty.

This is not an issue of party but of principle. Today I am sending a letter to the Senate leadership asking them to ratify the treaty, and I ask the Senate to do so this year. We signed this treaty in the late 1970's. Finally, after we took office, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted the treaty out of committee with a bipartisan vote in 1994. If we are going to be true to our own legacy of leadership in human rights, we must ratify this treaty.

When you look ahead to this new century and new millennium and you ask yourselves what you would like the story of the next 100 years to be, surely all of us want one big chapter to be about how, finally, in all nations of the world, people of all races and ethnic groups, of many different religious persuasions and cultural practices came together to guarantee that every young girl got a chance to grow up to live up to the fullest of her abilities and to live out her dreams. Let that be our mission as we leave today.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:47 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Saisuree Chutikal, Parliament of Thailand, who introduced the President; and Dr. Christine Gosden, professor of medical genetics, University of Liverpool, whose editorial-page commentary on Iraqi use of chemical weapons appeared in the Washington Post on March 11.

Memorandum on Steps To Combat Violence Against Women and Trafficking in Women and Girls

March 11, 1998

Memorandum for the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, the Administrator of the Agency for International Development, the Director of the United States Information Agency

Subject: Steps to Combat Violence Against Women and Trafficking in Women and Girls

As we celebrate International Women's Day today, we highlight the achievements of women around the world. We also acknowledge that there is much work yet to be done to ensure that women's human rights are protected and respected. The momentum generated by the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 continues to encourage our government, as well as nations around the world, to fulfill our commitments to improve the lives of women and girls.

I have, once again, called upon the Senate to give its advice and consent to ratification to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, thus enabling the United States to join 161 other countries in support of the Convention. This Convention is an effective tool that can be used to combat violence against women, reform unfair inheritance and property rights, and strengthen women's access to fair employment and economic opportunity. Ratification of this Convention will enhance our efforts to promote the status of women around the world. As we look at Afghanistan and the egregious human rights violations committed against women and girls at the hands of the Taliban, we recognize that this is an issue of global importance.

My Administration is working hard to eliminate violence against women in all its forms. Our efforts help to combat this human rights violation around the world and here in the United States. As part of the 1994 Crime Bill, I signed into law the Violence Against Women Act. This legislation declares certain forms of violence against women to be Federal crimes and provides for critical assistance to States, tribes, and local commu-

nities in their efforts to respond to this problem. The Department of Justice is implementing the Violence Against Women Act and working with communities across the country to promote criminal prosecution and provide services to victims. Through the Department of Health and Human Services, we have established for the first time a nationwide domestic violence hotline, so that women throughout the country can call one toll-free number and be connected to a local domestic violence support center. We have come a long way since 1994, and I am proud of our efforts.

Each day recognition of the importance of this issue grows around the world. In recent years, many countries have begun to respond to calls for legislation and government programs addressing violence against women. The international community increasingly regards violence against women as a fundamental human rights violation, an impediment to a nation's development, and an obstacle to women's full participation in democracy.

Today I am directing the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, and the President's Interagency Council on Women to continue and expand their work to combat violence against women here in the United States and around the world. We have made great progress since the enactment of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994, but there remains much to be done. We must continue to work to implement the Act fully and to restore the Act's protection for immigrant victims of domestic violence here in the United States so that they will not be forced to choose between deportation and abuse.

The problem of trafficking in women and girls, an insidious form of violence, has received a great deal of attention from the world community. This is an international problem with national implications. Here in the United States, we have seen cases of trafficking for the purposes of forced prostitution, sweatshop labor, and exploitative domestic servitude. The victims in these cases often believe they will be entering our country to secure a decent job. Instead, they are virtual prisoners, with no resources, little recourse, and no protection against violations of their human rights. My Administration is committed to combating trafficking in